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SUBJECT: MORE COMPROMISES FOR GOVERNMENT, MORE PROBLEMS FOR PAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: With the resignation of his PAN party credentials, Fernando Gomez Mont, the Secretary of Government (SEGOB) and Senior Minister in the GOM, sent ripples through a governing party, still recovering from its electoral defeat in last summer's congressional elections. Official sources, including Party President Cesar Nava, confirm Gomez Mont will remain at SEGOB for now. This continued tenure may afford Calderon new found political space to work out compromises with the opposition on a range of critical issues but it leaves the PAN in considerable disarray. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 10, Fernando Gomez Mont, Secretary of the Government (SEGOB), suddenly resigned from the governing National Action Party (PAN), surprising political observers. Although he currently remains in his cabinet post, Gomez Mont's resignation from the party appears to stem from internal PAN disputes over his efforts to reach a deal with the resurgent Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to pass reform legislation next session. These efforts allegedly were undercut by Party President Cesar Nava's efforts to ally PAN with the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) in gubernatorial elections in order to defeat the PRI. Gomez Mont's resignation reveals significant fractures within a party that had previously been better at keeping its problems under wraps. Gomez Mont will likely seek to use the veneer of his new found "independence" to forge compromises on the President's legislative priorities, including political reform.

Secretary of the Government: A High Level Post

¶3. (SBU) The Secretary of the Government is generally considered the second ranking person in the Mexican government after the President. SEGOB oversees internal political issues, ensures the government's compliance with constitutional rules, coordinates the national security and civil protection apparatus, and manages the Executive's relationships with Congress, as well as with state and local governments. Mexico's intelligence agency, immigration service, and many other critical domestic institutions are subordinate to SEGOB. Gomez Mont presents the President's bills to Congress, advises him on domestic issues, and serves as his main liaison with all the political parties.

Gomez Mont: Popular Long Time PANista

¶4. (SBU) President Calderon appointed Gomez Mont to SEGOB after the death of his predecessor, Juan Camilo Mourino, in November 2008 (reftel). Prior to his appointment, he worked as an attorney for his private law firm, Z????nser Esponda y Gomez Mont. His family has

long ties to Mexican politics; his father, Felipe G????mez Mont, was a PAN founder and ideologue. Gomez Mont's official career in politics began when he became a member of the PAN Central Committee and later Federal Deputy in 1991. He quit his position on the PAN's Central Committee in 1995 to open his law practice and went on to serve as an advisor on judicial and electoral issues in President Ernesto Zedillo's administration. In his private law practice, Gomez Mont defended some controversial figures, including the brother of former President Carlos Salinas and Rogelio Montemayor, a former director of Mexico's oil agency, PEMEX.

¶ 15. (SBU) Gomez Mont is generally well-respected in public and private circles, and is regarded as pragmatic, effective, and even-tempered. Although most of his career was in the private sector, many political observers considered him a potential PAN candidate for president in 2012. His recent move to resign from PAN comes as a surprise to observers who have long considered him a political pragmatist more than a hard-line ideologue.

Internal Conflicts Revealed by Resignation

¶ 16. (SBU) Gomez Mont's resignation from PAN was both unexpected and damaging to the party. Although his letter of resignation

MEXICO 00000520 002 OF 002

cited "reasons I cannot reveal due to professional discretion," speculation immediately centered on Gomez Mont's dissatisfaction with PAN-PRD electoral alliances being discussed in Durango, Oaxaca, Puebla, Hidalgo, and potentially other states. These alliances aim to unite ideologically opposed parties to defeat their common political adversary, the PRI. Despite Gomez Mont's strong vocal opposition, the PAN's Central Committee has already approved alliances in Oaxaca and Durango.

¶ 17. (SBU) Although Gomez Mont has always been a committed member of PAN, his opposition to the alliances stems not only from conflicts over philosophy, but also his efforts to work with PRI to pass legislation in Congress. Gomez Mont apparently had reached a deal with PRI leaders, that if PAN did not form alliances with PRD and other smaller leftist parties, PRI would work with PAN to pass legislative priorities. As soon as PAN announced it had approved the alliance in Durango, PRI called foul and called off all work to cooperate with PAN. Quitting the party is probably the result of Gomez Mont's dissatisfaction with his party's decision and the awkwardness he found himself in negotiating with the PRI.

¶ 18. (SBU) Due to his close relationship with Calderon, it is likely the President knew of Gomez Mont's intention to resign. Several political analysts have even suggested Gomez Mont's resignation could provide him a veneer of neutrality that should help him negotiate in better faith with PRI on the President's legislative priorities, including political reform. Clearly Gomez Mont can no longer be considered a viable presidential candidate, directing political accusations that would have detracted from his effectiveness. Of course, it remains to be seen whether PRI will regard him as genuinely independent or accept his anticipated overtures to continue negotiating compromises on key legislation.

PAN Faces Challenges Moving Forward

¶ 19. (SBU) Although he is a major national figure, Gomez Mont does not lead a wing of PAN. Nevertheless, his resignation reflects poorly on PAN and illustrates the problems the gubernatorial and state congressional alliances have created within the party. This is a difficult moment for PAN; Nava told the Ambassador that there is a debate between those who see the Government Minister's role as principally a channel between the party and president, while others view the Secretary as a vital cabinet member with a substantive portfolio who should have more independence from the party. Nava also noted that the party is concerned that Gomez Mont's resignation will complicate party support for the President during this election year.

¶10. (SBU) Opinion is divided as to whether Gomez Mont's departure is imminent. An analyst from the Center for Research for Development (CIDAC) told Poloff that Gomez Mont is Calderon's best cabinet member and speculated Calderon would be hard pressed to fire such a capable ally. Despite press reports predicting Gomez Mont's immediate departure from SEGOB, it is unlikely --though possible--that he will leave the Secretariat in the immediate future.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: Gomez Mont's resignation reflects serious divisions within the PAN over its alliances with PRD. It will place Party President Nava under even greater pressure to project the kind of united front the party needs in the upcoming election cycle. The coming days should reveal whether Gomez Mont intends to resign from his post as Government Minister; in some significant ways, that resignation would represent a greater blow to Calderon's administration. More likely, Gomez Mont will try to use his resignation to his advantage to negotiate more effectively with the PRI, and to push for transparency and accountability in the gubernatorial elections this summer. Ironically, if Gomez Mont is freer to exert pressure for a transparent political process, it would bring the most scrutiny on PRI states since they hold most of the governorships up for election. Whether or not Gomez Mont leaves SEGOB, Post highly regards him as a capable Secretary and effective interlocutor who has a positive relationship with the Mission. End Comment.

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